

2015 Legislative Session
TO: Senate Judiciary Committee
RE: Vote NO on HB 477

SENATE JUDICIARY
Additional Documents
Exhibit No. 33
SENATE: Judiciary
Date: 3/26/15
Bill No. HB 477
Nancy Dunne

Good day Chairman and Senators. Thank you for your vital public service. I am Nancy Dunne, a Byington, RN and naturopathic physician. I am a 1981 graduate of Montana State University's nursing science program, and have been most recently employed as a Hospice case manager. In this work I have participated in the dying process of many people. I am asking you to act with wisdom and compassion and Vote NO on HB 477.

Over 90% of Americans will die slowly of a chronic condition, rather than a sudden catastrophe. A slow decline to death can be a wonderful time of being in touch, finishing up, saying goodbye. Unfortunately, more often than not, dying is a confusing, chaotic, very sad time of prolonged suffering. Despite many improvements in palliative and hospice care, we have a long way to go to successfully deliver relief for a peaceful end-of-life. In fact the trend is worsening- in 1998 54% of people died in pain; as of 2010, 61% of us are dying in pain. Over half of us die in mental confusion and profound emotional distress. Distress at end-of-life is compounded because our families suffer when their final, despairing acts of loving kindness cannot bring peace or protect dignity.

For some of us, being rushed to the ER, dying in a hospital ICU is ideal. For others, ending life in a long-term care facility is considered optimal and experienced as loving way to die.

Some of us want to take charge of our end of life experience, with the support of our trusted physician. A private, very personal decision, that an adult of sound mind is currently free to make, will be stolen from Montana citizens if you pass HB 477.

Some of us prefer to die at home, and not in a hospital or facility, where family and friends have to fit in between the machines, wires and tubes and the schedule of the institutional staff. Some people choose to die while conscious, *before* the need for pain control or relief from relentless terminal confusion renders us helpless and unable to interact meaningfully on our own behalf.

It is not kind, loving or compassionate, *nor is it constitutional*, for this legislative body to ignore current law and a sturdy majority of public opinion, by threatening physicians with sanctions designed to interfere with another citizen's private medical choices. HB 477 would destroy the opportunity to make a legitimate choice to preserve personal dignity and turn end of life suffering into a gift. Thanks to our current kind and sensible legal standard, some Montanans have enjoyed a deeply personal, completely private and loving family gathering, not unlike a wedding or baptism, in which a conscious, aware individual is able to delight in being honored at a celebration of their life. Mentally competent dying people with manageable symptoms are able to offer and receive loving goodbyes, and then leave in a gentle, reliable way that blesses their family with memories that are a joy to cherish.

Please, do not attempt to trample our constitutional rights to privacy and choice during this uniquely precious time of life. Protect vital individual freedom to choose dignity and personal control at end of life for those who want it, and vote no on HB477. Thank you for your considered attention to our fundamental human rights.

Sincerely,

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